

The Discovery of the Ravenswood Goldfields.

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*(Read at a Meeting of the Historical Society of Queensland,
on October 12th, 1917.*

In June, 1868, I left Rockhampton in an open boat, for Yamba, then a small bush township, some twenty miles up the Fitzroy river, our starting point. There I joined my travelling companions, who had already left Rockhampton by road, with a dray, some horses, and enough provisions for six months. We had arranged to travel north, to a new goldfield on the Cape river, about five hundred miles away.

We started on the road with every hope for the future. After going through the general hardships incurred by bush travelling at that time, and passing through drought stricken country, we arrived on the banks of the Burdekin river, at a cattle station, named Ravenswood.

Our horses being in low condition and weak, we formed a camp on the river bank near the homestead, intending to remain there for at least a month, to allow our horses to get into travelling condition again. Knowing the manager of Ravenswood station we got a good deal of information from him about the country, and learned that gold, in small quantities, had been found in nearly all the water courses, for a considerable distance around, by a station employee named Thomas Aitken, who afterwards became a wealthy landowner at Townsville. To occupy our time, we did a good deal of prospecting for gold, but never found anything at all payable.

Twenty-five miles higher up the Burdekin river, at the junction of Elphinstone Creek, the Curr Brothers had formed another cattle station, which they named Merree Merrewar, and it was through them that payable gold was discovered on the present Ravenswood goldfield.

It happened this way. After Thomas Aitken left Ravenswood station he went to Townsville, taking with him the small amount of gold he had been able to procure whilst living there. Through the gold he was able to show, he induced a party of three men to start away on a prospecting expedition to the Ravenswood country. The names of the party were Crane, Brooks and Kelly.

After leaving Townsville and travelling towards the Burdekin river, they met Mr. Marmaduke Curr on his way to Townsville. He told them that he thought he could show them more likely country, and where he knew that pieces of quartz, containing gold, had been picked up, and if they were willing to remain at his homestead, which they would have to pass, until he returned from Townsville in two or three days' time he would take them to the exact place where the gold-bearing quartz had been found. They agreed, and within a week had pitched their tent on the south bank of Connolly creek, another small tributary of the Burdekin, its junction being about eight miles off.

We were soon on the spot, the grass being much better there, and plenty of water, and formed our camp on the same side of Connolly creek, only a few hundred yards lower down. This was about the middle of October, 1868. One day, at the end of the month, Brooks appeared at our tent door, his face all smiles, and carrying a miner's prospecting dish, his eyes fixed on the bottom, and judging from the expression of his face, it might have been full of minted sovereigns. He had come to let us know, and to show us, about a half ounce of gold which he had got in one dish full of wash-dirt taken from a gully not very far away.

This was afterwards called Tucker Gully, at the head of which was afterwards discovered the Perseverance, Donnybrook, and other gold-bearing quartz reefs.

The Perseverance was the first gold claim to be granted on the new goldfield, to John Slattery and party. The ground was pegged off by Mr. James Gordon, of Townsville, then the nearest police magistrate, who had come, or I may say been fetched, to the district for that purpose.

Mr. Curr had been able to procure a few ounces of gold, which he had taken for beef and other rations, and being anxious to have a population nearby, the market for fat cattle being at the time very limited, took "the gold" to Bowen, advertised it well, and was back within a week with some fifteen men following him. News soon spread, and soon the spot where we had pitched our tent became a prosperous mining township, named afterwards the Middle Camp. A much richer deposit of gold was

afterwards discovered on the watershed of Elphinstone-creek, and at the spot where the present City of Ravenswood now is.

The country for miles around was soon well prospected, and other small mining townships soon came into existence on both sides of the Burdekin river. On the northern side there was soon a fair-sized township at the junction of the Broughton with the Burdekin, and it was from the highland, on the Broughton watershed, that Mr. Hugh Mosman, who was then following mining pursuits, saw some high hills in the distance, which led to the discovery of the rich reefs which brought Charters Towers into existence in the year 1872.
